

July 29, 2005

Ms. Moya Thompson, Director
Outreach Coordinator
2005 White House Conference on Aging
c/o Administration on Aging
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Director Thompson:

Enclosed you will find the recommendations from the Anna V. Brown Community Forum a designated White House Conference on Aging event. The Anna V. Brown Community Forum is the longest continuously African American community forum. The past May 2, 2005 forum marked its ninetieth (19) year of existence.

It is our hope that the recommendations forwarded to you will be of assistance in the process of improving services for the nation's seniors. Our community forum participants worked hard to develop recommendations they thought would be useful in enhancing the lives of seniors.

If we can be of any further assistance please feel free to contact me at your convenience. I can be reached at the numbers listed at the bottom of this letter or by numbers on the enclosed card.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Williams, PhD-MPH
Chairperson Anna V. Brown Community Forum
Black Studies Director

Cc Anna V. Brown Community Forum Planning Committee
File

Anna V. Brown White House Conference on Aging Recommendations

On May 2, 2005 the nineteenth (19) Anna V. Brown Community Forum on African American Elderly was held. This forum was designated as a White House Conference on Aging national site. Well over three hundred (300) individuals attended the forum which was held at the Friendly Inn Settlement House. Participants included former Congressman Louis Stokes, State Senator George Voinovich, Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs-Jones, Jane Campbell, the mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, Ohio State Representative C.J. Prentiss, Peter Lawson Jones, Cuyahoga County Commissioner and Frank Jackson, City of Cleveland Council President. Other notables were Dr. Michael Schwartz, President of Cleveland State University and Ms. Joan Lawrence, Director of the Ohio Department of Aging.

Attached you will find a copy of the Forum's agenda and program. The brochure lists the various sponsors, cosponsors and planning committee members who made the event successful. It is this unique collaboration that has resulted in the Anna V. Brown Community Forum being the United States' longest continuous African American elderly forum.

The following recommendations come from the day-long presentations and three afternoon working sessions. The recommendations from each of the three sessions were ranked order based upon the priorities set by the session participants. The participants would like to see their recommendations included in any final results that may emerge from the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

Session One: Communities as We Age

Session Goal: To provide input and advocate for needed public policies changes concerning housing, communities and services, and to increase understanding about the Older Americans Act

Session Participants: Seventy (70) individuals participated in this session. The group consisted of elders, consumers of aging services, professionals and service providers. Three panelists framed the discussion by outlining their views on elder friendly communities and service delivery network supported by the Older Americans Act.

Session One Recommendations

- **Reauthorize the Older Americans Act with additional resources to adequately fund the service delivery system.** The programs that the Act funds play a vital role in assisting elders to maintain their independence. Additional monies should be placed in such programs as Home Repair, Transportation, health promotion and senior centers.
- **Transportation:** Continue to fund local, state and national efforts to address seniors' transportation needs. Fund demonstration projects that will enhance service delivery.
- **Senior Centers:** Senior centers continue to play a vital part in enhancing the lives of the nation's seniors. Increased funding is needed to promote life long learning and health issues vital to the population's well-being.

- **Affordable Housing:** Increased funding is needed to assist seniors in the effort to maintain and keep their homes. Assistance is also needed by seniors to find housing that they can afford.
- **Home Health Aide Shortage:** Increase funding and educational efforts to increase the number of qualified home health aides. This effort is critical in light of the forecast that the number of elderly needing assistance will greatly increase while the number home health aides is expected to decrease.

Session Two: Income Security in Later Life

Session Goal: The goal of this session was to examine the current income situation of elders. Particular attention was paid to the Social Security Program and the proposed changes to the system.

Session Participants: Eighty (80) individuals participated in this session. The participants consisted of seniors, service providers, Social Security Program officials, and income policy experts.

Session Two Recommendations

- **Maintain the current basic structure of the Social Security Program.** The participants recognized that some changes made be needed to keep the system solvent. The participants were against any privatization of the system as it has been proposed by the current administration.
- **Eliminate the current Social Security tax cap on income.** The participants recommended that all income be taxed by Social Security. The additional income gained in this process would keep the program solvent and solid.
- **Develop a national standard of living for elderly individuals.** The country should develop a standard of living designed to prevent the elderly from experiencing a *poverty ridden old age*. This would be in keeping with Franklin Roosevelt's origin goal for social security.
- **Separate Social Security Funds from the Federal Budget General Operating Funds.** Participants believed that Social Security should be kept in a "lock box". This would assist in the nation determining true status of the fund.

Session Three: Health Care: Leveling the Playing Field

Session Goal: The goal of the session was to examine, explore and make recommendations to improve the quality and accessibility of health care services. Particular attention was given to identifying, reducing and eliminating barriers to seniors accessing health services.

Session Participants: Eighty-five (85) individuals participated in the Health Care session. The participants consisted of seniors, service providers, health care professionals, policy makers and politicians.

Session Three Recommendations

- **There must be a concerted effort to improve the level of communication between the patient and physician.** Participants strongly recommended that physicians spend more time with patients. Seniors observed that physicians do not develop quality relationships with them which gain their trust which would allow them to open up more, resulting in better treatment outcomes.
Participants also commented that physicians and health care providers should become more sensitive and understanding of cultural differences and the aging process. Participants thought that if medical schools included more gerontology and cultural sensitivity trainings health professionals would be more effective in meeting seniors' needs.
- **Despite the increased number of prescription drug options coverage still remains confusing and inadequate.** Participants observed that the many options offered are too costly and confusing to understand. Some options meet less need than others. Conferees recommended the development of a uniform, universal one-card system for all seniors obtaining prescription drugs. Participants recommended that individuals who have incomes 250% below the FPL be exempt from paying co-pays and deductibles. Participants would like to see Medicare negotiate drug prices with companies. They recommended less restriction on the importation of prescription drugs.
- **Physicians and health professionals must include seniors more in the process of developing treatment plans.** Participants recommended the creation of a senior patient advocate (Ombudsperson) within the health/health related systems serving the elderly population. This position would ensure that each patient has a written plan of action following diagnostic workup, including schedule for follow-up treatment. Participants recommended a health/health system orientation be developed. The purpose of the orientation is to familiarize seniors with the Patient Bill of Rights.
- **Attention must be given to the serious lack of available transportation for seniors to reach health care facilities.** Participants strongly suggested that federal legislation is needed to create a uniform system of transportation designed to facilitate the senior population access to health care services. Federal, state and local plans should be developed in consultation and collaboration with each other to ensure the proper outcome.